

HORTUS HISTORIAE

STUDIES IN
HONOUR OF
PROFESSOR
JÓZEF WOLSKI
ON THE 100TH
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BIRTHDAY

EDITED BY

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HORTUS HISTORIAE

KSIĘGA
PAMIĄTKOWA
KU CZCI
PROFESORA
JÓZEFA
WOLSKIEGO
W SETNĄ
ROCZNICĘ
URODZIN

POD REDAKCJĄ

E. DĄBROWY, M. DZIELSKIEJ,
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KRAKÓW 2010



JÓZEF WOLSKI

1910-2008

HISTORIÆ ANTIQVÆ
PRÆCEPTOR DILECTISSIMVS
VNIVERSITATIS IAGELLONICÆ
PROFESSOR EGREGIVS



Hortus Historiae.

Księga pamiątkowa ku czci profesora Józefa Wolskiego w setną rocznicę urodzin
pod redakcją E. Dąbrowy, M. Dzielskiej, M. Salamona, S. Sprawskiego
Kraków 2010

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(1937–2008)

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Mithradates I of Parthia and His Conquests up to 141 B.C.¹

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(Rzeszów)

In more than 70 years that passed from the beginning of Arsaces I's reign (ca. 247–217) to Mithradates I's rise to power (ca. 170/165), the Arsacids built a solid economic and military foundation for their monarchy to develop.² What with the king's outstanding personality and his excellent policies, the Arsacid state under Mithradates I (ca. 170/165–132) rose to the rank of the main power in Western and southern Central Asia. Mithradates I claimed and acquired the territories of not only the expanse of the Iranian Plateau complete with proverbially rich Media, but also lands outside it, including Babylonia and parts of Bactria. A yet about the year 170, the Arsacid kingdom, spanning Khorasan, Gorgan, and southern Turkmenistan, had been a regional power, one of several medium-sized states which included Graeco-Bactria, Media Atropatene, Cappadocia, and Armenia — offspring kingdoms that had sprouted from the falling Seleucid

¹ The period of Arsacid rule was the subject of years-long study by Professor Józef Wolski which brought excellent results. Thanks to his contribution, the little-known history of Parthian Iran, especially the period of the first Arsacids, was first given a coherent reconstruction, and figures like Arsaces I or Arsaces II became enhanced (cf. Wolski 1937–1938; 1947; 1974; 1993; 2003). The present outline is a modest contribution to research originated by the great Master, to whom I am beholden for his immense kindness and generous support of my scholarly pursuits starting from my doctorate. The present paper was completed thanks to the support from the Ministry of Science and Higher Education (grant NN108 1437 33). All dates in this paper are B.C., unless otherwise indicated.

² Olbrycht 1998: 51–76.

monarchy or appeared on its fringes. Mithradates I's political program led Parthia along an inevitable collision course with Graeco-Bactria and the Seleucid state.

The present study centers on relations between Mithradates I's kingdom and the Graeco-Bactrian state, and the extent of Arsacid rule in western Iran (excluding Persis and Elymais) up to 141 (when Babylonia was subjugated), which has so far only merited marginal treatment in research.³

Mithradates I was a son of Phriapatius (Friyapātak), who is known to have reigned for 15 years.⁴ After Phriapatius, the throne passed to his elder son Phraates.⁵ This king proceeded to fight the Amardians, whom Iustinus (41.5.9) describes as a powerful enemy (*validam gentem*). It may therefore be assumed that victory over them was no easy matter. The Amardians (also called Mardians in accounts) inhabited an area in the Alborz mountains and foothills, bordering on Hyrcania in the east and Media in the south-west. Their western neighbors were the Cadusians on the Caspian Sea.⁶ With their geographical placement, the Amardians could easily threaten communication routes leading from Hyrcania and western Parthia via today's Teheran area and Ray to Media and western Iran.⁷ An attack on them must have stemmed from the Arsacid strategy to increase possessions in Iran proper. Along this front, the primary Parthian objective was to conquer Media. Groups of deported Amardians were settled in Charax (Isid., *Stathm.* 7), a colony located at the foot of Mt. Caspius, not far from the Caspian Gates (south-east of present-day Teheran).

Having snatched the area of Charax and Caspian Gates from Seleucid hands, Parthians controlled the territory that was the gateway to Media and western Iran. It was just a matter of time when they would attack Median capital Ecbatana. By capturing Charax and defeating the Amardians, Phraates I had prepared ground for his successor to expand further. Phraates I had several sons, but he passed the throne to his brother Mithradates (Iust. 41.5.9–10).⁸

³ On the conquests of the Parthians under Mithradates I in Bactria and Western Iran, see Tarn 1951: 222–223; Masson 1951; Daffinà 1967: 40–82; Mukherjee 1969; Wolski 1980; Schipmann 1980: 24; Olbrycht 1998: 82–105; Dąbrowa 2006.

⁴ On Phriapatius, see Karras-Klapproth 1988: 152–153.

⁵ Iust. 41.5.9. On Phraates I, see Karras-Klapproth 1988: 131–132.

⁶ On Amardians/Mardians living to the south of the Caspian Sea, see Strab. 11.7.1; 11.8.8; 11.13.6; Diod. 17.76.3; Curt. 6.5.11; Mela 3.39; 42; Plin., *NH* 6.36; 47; Dionys. Per. 732f. (GGM II 149); Steph. Byz. s.v. *Mardoī*. Cf. Andreas 1894; Kaletsch 1999.

⁷ Another campaign against Amardians/Mardians was launched by Alexander the Great in 330 B.C. See Seibert 1985: 117–118; Olbrycht 2004: 107, 121.

⁸ The late antique author Orosius (5.4.16) adds laconically that Mithradates became the Parthians' sixth king: *Mithridates tunc siquidem, rex Parthorum sextus ab Arsace*. His information sounds surprising in that Iustinus (41.5.8) calls Phriapatius the third king of the Parthians,

Iustinus 41.6.1 uses the phrase *eodem ferme tempore* to synchronize two significant facts: the rise to the throne by Mithradates in Parthia and by Eucratides in Graeco-Bactria: *Eodem ferme tempore, sicut in Parthis Mithridates, ita in Bactris Eucratides, magni uterque viri, regna ineunt*. At this point, research runs into serious difficulty since we do not know the absolute chronology either for Mithradates I or for Eucratides. Worse still, how long they reigned remains obscure. Judging by quite hypothetical calculations of the early Arsacid chronology⁹ and considering approximate synchronism with Eucratides, the start of Mithradates I's reign can be dated at ca. 170–165.¹⁰

As he ascended to power in Parthia, Mithradates I faced grave challenges. Further development of the Arsacid state was possible on the condition that its greatest rivals, the Seleucid state and Graeco-Bactria, were defeated and stripped of any major military potential once and for all. But the Seleucid monarchy, although it yielded to Rome in the war of 192–188, had large economic and military resources in Iran itself and continued to be a power. Under Antiochus IV (175–164), the Seleucid state was strengthened.¹¹ Humiliated by the Romans in Egypt (168), Antiochus IV decided to concentrate on consolidating his eastern satrapies (including Media and the Persian Gulf region) and planned a war against the Parthians (165–164).¹²

Parthia's eastern neighbor, Graeco-Bactria, remained a menace, all the more so as the energetic Eucratides rose to leadership. A lasting testimony, Eucratides left behind his coinage, later imitated by Transoxiana nomads and others.¹³ Iustinus (41.6.1–3) implies that Eucratides fought with many neighbors, defeated his rival Demetrius, and conquered lands in India; other than that, little is known about his achievements. Eucratides died murdered by his son (Iust. 41.6.5). The killer's name may only be indirectly inferred from numismatic material: it was probably Heliocles.¹⁴ He may have been

so in his version Mithradates I, successor of Phraates I, would be the fifth ruler in the dynasty. It seems that Orosius had good sources available to him including Apollodorus of Artemita (Nikonorov 1998: 116, n. 20, and 119) and his information should not be dismissed a priori. Perhaps the sources he drew from contained information about some Parthian king who had not won general recognition. Parthia had possibly seen a sharp dispute over the throne after Arsaces II's death whereby Phriapatius had a rival whom he eliminated. Some accounts, including by Trogus/Iustinus, did not consider Phriapatius' rival a legitimate ruler.

⁹ The question is elaborated on separately, see M.J. Olbrycht, *Arsacid Iran and the Nomads of Central Eurasia*, Leiden 2010/2011 (in preparation).

¹⁰ For latest chronological calculations, see Assar 2004; 2006a; 2006b.

¹¹ On Antiochus IV, see Mittag 2006.

¹² For Antiochus' planned war against the Parthians, see Habicht 1989: 351; Grainger 1997: 24–25. Contra Mittag 2006: 318–327.

¹³ Boppearachchi 1991: 66–83, 85–86; Zeymal 1983: 93–109.

¹⁴ So Bernard 1998: 63. Narain 1989: 402 identifies as the patricide an assumed son of Eucratides named Plato (known with the appellation Epiphanes; his coins showed Helios

the last king of Graeco-Bactria ruling over the entire kingdom.¹⁵ Based on numismatic material, some scholars call Eucratides I's successor Eucratides II.¹⁶

The prospect of war on two fronts (as under Arsaces I) that could destroy the Arsacid state must have worried Mithradates I gravely. Strategically, he had no other option but to take the initiative and eliminate external threats on both fronts, east and west.¹⁷

Seleucid rule in western Iran following the death of Antiochus IV in 164 was not stable. In Media, Antiochus IV's close associate Timarchus became an independent king. After Antiochus IV died, Timarchus reinforced his grip on Media and vigorously fought against his rival Demetrius I. On his coins he appears as *basileus megas*, while a literary account speaks of him as *Medorum rex* (Trog., *Prol.* 34).¹⁸ Diodorus 31.27a writes that Timarchus intimidated the neighboring peoples by an impressive display of force, and brought many of them under his sway. Moreover, he entered into an alliance against Demetrius with Artaxias, king of Armenia. Such information is highly valuable as it proves that smaller kingdoms, such as, say, Armenia, played an important part in the geopolitics of the time. What peoples did Timarchus subdue? Possibly they were the Elymaians and Atropatene Medians. But what about the Parthians? Iustinus' remark that struggles between Parthians and Medians varied (41.6.6) may also apply to Timarchus, who was able to restrain Mithradates I's aspirations for a time. Probably, therefore, Timarchus demonstrated his military strength in the east by repulsing Parthian attacks, which gave him freedom of action against Demetrius I in the west. After the sudden fall of Timarchus, Media passed under control of Demetrius I (162–150).

His first major military operations Mithradates I launched against Graeco-Bactria. His struggles with Graeco-Bactria may be roughly divided into two stages: one in the first half of his reign, the other in its last decade.¹⁹ Mithradates I's attainments versus Graeco-Bactria are outlined in a passage by Iustinus (41.6.1–3): *Eodem ferme tempore, sicut in Parthis Mithridates, ita in Bactris Eucratides, magni uterque viri, regna ineunt. Sed Parthorum fortuna felicior ad summum hoc duce imperii fastigium eos perduxit. Bactriani autem per varia bella*

and a quadriga). According to this version, his brother Heliocles (also called Dikaios) later rose against Plato.

¹⁵ Bopearachchi 2004 only knows Eucratides I (171–145) and his successor Heliocles I (145–130) as the last Greek kings to rule a central kingdom in Bactria.

¹⁶ Ca. 145–140, cf. Bernard 1998: 164.

¹⁷ Cf. Wolski 1980.

¹⁸ Knepp 1989; Carsana 1996: 126–127; Savalli-Lestrade 1998: no. 62; Ehling 2008: 124–130.

¹⁹ Mithradates I's two wars in Bactria and eastern Iran are addressed by Junge 1949: 1975–1979.

iactati non regnum tantum, verum etiam libertatem amiserunt, siquidem Sogdianorum et Arachotorum et Drangarum et Areorum Indorumque bellis fatigati ad postremum ab invalidioribus Parthis velut exsanguis oppressi sunt.

The message is clear enough: The Graeco-Bactrians, buffeted in various conflicts, lost their empire and their liberty. Exhausted by wars with the Sogdians, Arachosians, Drangians, Areioi and Indians, the Graeco-Bactrians fell under the power of the Parthians.

The war between Parthia and Graeco-Bactria is referred to in a passage in Strabo 11.11.2, which reports laconically on the Parthian conquest of Eucratides' two satrapies. Strabo states that the Greeks divided Bactria into satrapies, "of which the satrapy of Aspiones (τὴν τε Ἀσπιώνων) and that of Tourioua (τὴν Τουριούαν) were taken away from Eucratides".

Unfortunately, the passage offers no chronological hint. It is still justified to hypothesize that Strabo is speaking about Mithradates I' first attack on Bactria during which two satrapies were overrun. Strabo places this mention in the context of a description of Bactrian Greeks' power which extended at its height from the Iaxartes (Syr Darya) and Sogdiana to the Indus valley. The entire description, beginning in section 11.11.1, is based on Apollodorus of Artemita, a knowledgeable expert on Parthian and Bactrian history.²⁰ For Apollodorus, the capture of Bactrian satrapies was a great achievement for the Parthians, worthy of a separate mention. No small fringe territories could they have been.²¹ One of the satrapies was Tourioua (Touriva) the other went by the name of Aspiones' satrapy. The toponym Tourioua/Touriva is not confirmed in available onomastic material for Bactria. The other designation is simply the satrap's proper name. It certainly is purely Iranian as it contains the characteristic cluster *asb-*, or 'horse'.²² The figure of Aspiones is completely unknown outside Strabo's mention.

In order to place Mithradates I's conquests, we need first to estimate his possessions on his ascent to power. Contrary to some opinions, there are no grounds to doubt essentially the whole Khorasan belonging to the early Arsacid kingdom.²³ What is debatable is where exactly lay the border between Parthia and Graeco-Bactria. It may be thought certain that about 209, western

²⁰ Lasserre 1975: 14.

²¹ Koshelenko, Bader, Gaibov 1996: 138 believe that those satrapies cannot be placed exactly.

²² Altheim, Stiehl 1970: 397 interpret the name Aspiones as **aspa-yaona-*, dessen Staette das Pferd ist'. Schmitt 1975: 83 rejects this etymology, pointing instead to Sogdian names ending in -y'n. Abdullaev 1999 treats the designation given by Strabo as a geographic name *Aspiona* and identifies it with Kasbi in the Bukhara region.

²³ A minimalist view on the extent of the early Arsacid monarchy, not comprising lands south of the Kopetdagh Mountains, is presented by Sherwin-White, Kuhrt 1993: 88. Their hypothesis is not based on any legitimate premises. It is contradicted by Polyb. 10.29–32.

frontier areas of Graeco-Bactria included Areia, which saw the armed clash between Antiochus III and the Graeco-Bactrian Euthydemus (Polyb. 10.49). Iustinus 41.6.3 mentions Areians (*Areioi*) among the peoples fighting against Eucratides. Overlooked by scholars, the mention proves that that people, living on the Harirud-Tedjen river, rebelled against Graeco-Bactrian dominance, as did the Sogdians and others. It should be remembered that Eucratides was a usurper and his rule must have met with resistance from some of his subjects. Iustinus lists a whole daisy chain of Iranian peoples surrounding Bactrian heartland: Sogdians, Arachotes, Drangians, and Areians. Not impossibly, Mithradates I supported the revolt as it served Parthian interests.

The Areians fighting against Eucratides implies that Areia did not belong to the Parthians and, although rebelling against Eucratides, had been within the sphere of Graeco-Bactrian political domination. In the western borderland of Areia contiguous with Parthia proper lived the Masdoranoi.²⁴ There can be no doubt that the toponym Mazduran known from medieval sources and seen on contemporary maps was the location of the Masdoranoi people. Therefore the dividing line between the Arsacid kingdom and Graeco-Bactria about 170–165 lay along Areia's western border, slightly to the west of Tedjen and Hari-rud and near Mazduran. Placed between Areia and Bactrian heartland, Margiana must have belonged to Graeco-Bactria,²⁵ which is also documented by numismatic evidence (see below). If so, than Mithradates' invasion first targeted Areia, Margiana, and western Bactria.

There is some truth in F. Lasserre's intuitions in locating *Aspionis provincia* at the foot of the Hindu Kush in the region between Margiana and the Harirud-Tedjen rivers. As for Tourioua satrapy, F. Lasserre places it in western fringes of Bactria.²⁶ A well-argued opinion about the scope of Parthian territorial gains is voiced by E.V. Rtveladze: Tourioua/Touriva was a province with today's districts Maimana and Andkhai (western Afghanistan), while Aspiones' satrapy was the area of Bactra itself (Balkh).²⁷ What raises doubts is the etymology Tourioua/Touriva < Tariab < Fariab²⁸; such was the name, Rtveladze believes, of the western part of Afghan Turkestan. Although the justification of the name seems not quite persuading, it must be said that Rtveladze rightly points to a relatively large scope of Mithradates I's conquests

²⁴ Ptol., *Geogr.* 6.17.3. The name is also confirmed as Mt. Masdoranon (Ptol., *Geogr.* 6.5.1). See Weissbach 1930: 2065.

²⁵ Rightly so Koshelenko, Bader, Gaibov 1996: 135.

²⁶ Lasserre 1975: 150 and 177.

²⁷ Rtveladze 1992; 1995: 184–185.

²⁸ Fariab is a province in north central Afghanistan, with the capital in Maimana. The region is famous for horse breeding and Buzkashi games, see Adamec 2003: 109.

in Bactria. K. Abdullaev lists Fariab, the middle course of Amu Darya (Old Charjou and Mirzabekkala), and Tarab (in northwestern part of the Bukhara oasis) as places included in the Tourioua satrapy, which seems generally justified.²⁹

The name Tourioua seems a rendition of the Avestan term *Tūriya-* (*Yāšt* 13.143) meaning 'Turan, Turanian'.³⁰ The name Turan referred principally to lands outside Iran and Bactria. It suggests a borderland province between Iran proper, Bactria, and partly nomad-inhabited regions of Central Asia. Such location would be best answered by western Bactrian territory and lands on the middle Amu Darya as borderlands between the urbanized areas and the nomadic areas of the Karakum and Kyzylkum. Such territories had a special status between peripheral Iran and Bactria, Sogdiana, and the steppes.³¹

Summing up, it should be assumed that the satrapies conquered by Mithradates I lay in western fringes of Eucratides' kingdom and embraced at least Areia (the Harirud-Tedjen Valley) and Margiana. How far to the east did Mithradates I move his frontiers? Quite likely he extended his domain to the Zariaspes/Bactra river, which flowed near the present-day city of Mazar-e Sharif. This was how far Arsacid influence reached in the 1st century B.C. and 1st century A.D.³² One more aspect deserves attention: it seems that full control over western (and perhaps central) Bactria was not possible without mastery over the Amu Darya valley middle section from Charjou/Amol to Kampyrtepa³³. These lands, too, should thus be counted as Mithradates I's gains. The area, which remained under Parthian influence until the second half of the 1st century A.D., should probably be identified with Traxiane land, known from 80's–70's B.C. Parthian coins.³⁴ That Arsacid hold on Bactria became stronger is indicated by a fragment in Moses of Khorene (2.68) saying that Arshak the Great, who may be roughly identified with Mithradates I, went to Balkh (Bactra).³⁵

Widely repeated in literature is W.W. Tarn's hypothesis in which province names given by Strabo 11.11.2 were substituted by the names Tapuria (instead of Tourioua) and Traxiane (instead of Aspiones' satrapy), which is sheer

²⁹ Abdullaev 1999: 6.

³⁰ For more on the term, see Yarshater 1985; Altheim, Stiehl 1970: 390.

³¹ Altheim, Stiehl 1970: 390 suggest that Touriva lay in the western reaches of Bactria, but siting it in Choresm seems geographically unfounded.

³² Olbrycht 1998: 127.

³³ At Kampyrtepa, several Parthian coins and a number of other items (figurines and a ring) of Parthian origin have been discovered, see Rtveladze 2009: 169–170.

³⁴ Olbrycht 1998: 108. On Parthian influence in the Charjou/Amol-Mukry region, see also Pilipko 1976a; Masson 1993.

³⁵ See Assar 2006a: 72–73.

speculation.³⁶ Tarn placed both lands in Khorasan: Tapuria was the Atrak valley, and Traxiane was the area of Kashafrud, which necessarily leads to the conclusion that Mithradates I's war against Eucratides was fought not in Bactria proper but in Iran! Tarn ignored Strabo's 11.11.2 account, juggling place names at will. He believed that Mithradates I won back most of Khorasan lands, allegedly carved out of Parthia soon after 206. Of key importance is Tarn's following statement on this Graeco-Bactrian victory: "The conquest is reflected in Apollodorus' statement that the Arius flows *through* Bactria, and it implies a war with Bactria, though the occasion is unknown".³⁷ Tarn's is unique logic: Apollodoros apud Strabo writes that it was the Ochos river, and not the Areios/Arius that flowed across Bactria. The whole intricate hypothesis is based on the false assumption that the Ochos was the Areios, well known as the Harirud.³⁸ In fact, the Bactrian Ochos is Ab-e Andkhui.³⁹ Unfortunately, Tarn's hypothesis has won many supporters.⁴⁰

The above discussion leads to the conclusion that both provinces, Aspiones' and Tourioua, lay in the area from Hari-rud to middle Amu Darya and in the vicinity of the city of Mazar-e Sharif. It was this region that continued for centuries to be an arena of confrontation between kings of Iran and steppe tribes pushing from Transoxiana, as is reflected in Iranian epic.⁴¹

Acquiring Areia, Margiana, and western Bactria was for the Parthians a breakthrough in securing their north-eastern frontiers from a powerful neighbor in the east. The Parthians had conceivably taken advantage of Eucratides' involvement in India to incorporate the enemy's western provinces. Their annexation amounted to a breach in Graeco-Bactrian hegemony in the region. Yet Eucratides was not dethroned: apparently he was now a Parthian vassal, trying his luck in India. The above-quoted passage in Iustinus 41.6.3–5 speaks of a rivalry between Parthians and Bactrians concluded with the earlier winning. The statement that Bactrians lost their freedom to Parthians implies that Mithradates I elicited homage from

Eucratides. That Eucratides and his successors became vassalized, as were nomadic conquerors in Bactria, is also directly indicated by Strabo 11.9.2; as he outlines the Parthian ascent, he emphasizes that "they also took a part of Bactriana, having forced the Scythians, and still earlier Eucratides and his followers, to yield to them".

There is no direct dating evidence for Mithradates I's invasion of Bactria. It may only be guessed that it happened before Parthians became fully involved in conquering Media, which came about ca. 148, but required extensive effort of perhaps many years; prolonged fighting with Medes is implied by Iust. 41.6.6. Dating the Median conflict at ca. 155–148 seems probable enough. The attack on Bactria was presumably launched not long after Antiochus IV's actions in western Iran (165–164). The period 163–155 is therefore probable.⁴²

Thanks to Mithradates I's conquests, the bastion of Arsacid domination in north-eastern frontiers of their empire was located in Margiana with its metropolis Merv (Antiocheia in Margiana).⁴³ This country is worth dwelling on, especially since Margiana has been quite thoroughly researched by archaeologists. It is numismatic evidence that offers some insight into political events in Parthia and its dependent Margiana. Discoveries in Merv yielded Seleucid, Graeco-Bactrian, and Parthian coins. Today, we know 23 Graeco-Bactrian coins from Merv, comprising issues from Diodotos I to Eucratides. During the latter's reign, there definitely operated a mint in Merv, producing local monetary types.⁴⁴ The earliest Parthian coin discovered there is a drachm of Phraates II.⁴⁵ However, it features no monogram to identify the mint.⁴⁶ Some drachms of Phraates II bear a monogram MAP identified with the Merv mint, MAP probably being a Greek abbreviation for Margiana. The earliest coin of this type was discovered in Garry-Kiariz, 57 km west of Ashgabad (Turkmenistan).⁴⁷ Additionally, several similar coins

⁴² Literature offers different dates. Mithradates' conquests is dated at ca. 160–155 by Schippmann 1980: 24; similarly Karras-Klapproth 1988: 78. Loginov, Nikitin 1996: 40 speak of the date of about 150. Daffinà 1967: 39 dates Mithradates I's partial conquest of Bactria at 160 or 159 (after Tarn 1951: 219). Koshelenko 1972: 97, gives the date 160–150.

⁴³ Not all scholars agree with the hypothesis that Margiana was conquered by Mithradates I's Parthians. Mithradates I as the conqueror was postulated by, among others, Tolstov 1948: 241. Recently Loginov, Nikitin 1996 date it at 150. Smirnova 2007: 382 suggests that Margiana was conquered by Parthians in the mid-2nd century, effectively accepting Mithradates I as the conqueror. Masson 1951: 147, in following Tarn 1951: 55, who gave 115 as the date of the annexation of Margiana, favored putting the event at Mithradates II's reign (123–187).

⁴⁴ Koshelenko 1985: 241; Smirnova 2007: 379.

⁴⁵ Type Sellwood 16.1; cf. Smirnova 2007: Fig. 11.

⁴⁶ Loginov, Nikitin 1996: cat. no. 2.

⁴⁷ Pilipko 1976b: 116, no. 28; Koshelenko, Bader, Gaibov 1996: 138.

³⁶ Tarn 1930: 124–126; 1951: 87–88.

³⁷ Tarn 1951: 88.

³⁸ Tarn 1951: 113.

³⁹ Olbrycht 1992; 2003; 2009.

⁴⁰ It was professed by Debevoise 1938: 19; Junge 1949: 1975; also Daffinà (1967: 38–39, 64, 68) speaks of Touriua/Tapouraia and Traxiane, siting them west of the Areios river. Its echoes are clearly discernible in the works by Sherwin-White, Kuhrt 1993 and Lerouge 2007: 228–229.

⁴¹ Markwart 1938: 137–140. The term Tourioua/Touriva is perhaps a name Parthians gave to the territories they had acquired. Similarly, the name Aspiones may refer to an Arsacid, rather than a Graeco-Bactrian satrap.

from Turkmenistan are in private collections.⁴⁸ Beginning with Phraates II, successive Parthian kings issued many coins in Merv.⁴⁹ So far, no specimen has come to light from the reign of Mithradates I. The fact should not come as a surprise as Margiana's monetary circulation was then dominated by ample Graeco-Bactrian issues. Modest at first, products of Mithradates I's mints did not quickly become widespread on conquered territories. Monograms MAP and APEIA seen on coins of Phraates II indicate that Margiana and Areia found themselves in Parthian hands no later than during his reign. Recently, Koshelenko, Bader, and Gaibov (1996: 138–141) used numismatic evidence to suggest the dating of those lands to Phraates II's time. The concept is erroneous, however, as Phraates II (reigned 132–126) was not capable of offensive action in the northeastern fringes of the Parthian empire. On the contrary, he was forced to defend himself against Central Asian nomads and Antiochus VII Sidetes (130–129). Additionally, on ascending to the throne he was a minor. Such circumstances help further justify the assumption that Margiana was incorporated in Parthia during the reign of Phraates II's father Mithradates I, likely during his years of war against Eucratides, ca. 163–155. Possibly, under Mithradates I and Phraates II Merv saw the construction of the first Parthian wall (called the Phase 3 Wall), with a second wall erected during subsequent centuries of Arsacid dominance.⁵⁰

We know that Mithradates I conquered Media after some heavy fighting (Iust. 41.6.6–7). Characteristically, Iustinus describes Mithradates' conquest of Media as a war with the Medes, and not their country's formal rulers, the Seleucids. The last unquestionable piece of evidence for Seleucid control over Media, or at least its western part, is a Greek-Aramaic inscription honoring the governor of Upper Satrapies Cleomenes, founded by Hyacinthos in Bisotun, dated to 149/8, month Panemos (May/June).⁵¹ For unknown reasons, the Aramaic text was never completed. A possible explanation might be a sudden Parthian attack.⁵² Thus, the conquest of Media was complete by about 148, but heavy fighting continued from at least 155.⁵³ Having defeated Media, Mithradates handed power to one Bakasis

⁴⁸ Loginov, Nikitin 1996: 40.

⁴⁹ Nikitin 1996; 1998; Smirnova 2007: 383.

⁵⁰ Zavyalov 2007: 326–327. For fortifications of Merv, see also Olbrycht 1993.

⁵¹ Huyse 1995: 111–112; Sherwin-White, Kuhrt 1993: 223.

⁵² The inscription was placed near a sculpture of Heracles Callinicos, or Gloriously Triumphant. It was probably intended as a monument to victory over the Parthians. Premature perhaps as the latter apparently launched another offensive and won a final victory, preventing completion of the inscription.

⁵³ The conquest is dated at shortly after 148 by Le Rider 1965: 338ff.; Schippmann 1980: 24; Frye 1984: 210. The situation in the Seleucid state in 148–140 is described by Ehling 2008: 182–183.

(Iust. 41.6.7). It cannot be ruled out that that Bakasis was the king's brother known from Babylonian sources of the 130's as Bagāyāsh.⁵⁴

Available reports on Parthian acquisitions in Media are highly fragmentary and rarely afford tying together isolated facts into a coherent whole. One example is the story of Rhaga/Arsakia. Sources speak loosely about a tell-tale change in the name of the eastern Median capital Rhaga to Arsakia by Parthians, but fail to relate which Arsacid captured the city. Strabo 11.13.6 maintains that Rhaga was renamed Europos by Seleucus I and then Arsakia by Parthians. The same says Stephanus Byzantinus (s.v. 'Ράγα) about the city of Arsake. Possibly the same city is mentioned by Pliny 6.113 (*Arsace*). But later authors, Ptolemaios (*Geogr.* 6.2.16–17; 8.21.10) and Ammianus Marcellinus (23.6.39), know of both cities, Rhaga and Arsakia, as separate foundations.⁵⁵ Perhaps they drew from different sources and seeing two distinct names assumed them to be two cities rather than one. Renaming Arsakia must have been a consequence of its capture by Mithradates I. It cannot be excluded that it happened very early in his reign, either before or during Antiochus IV's campaign — while Ecbatana was then assuredly in the Seleucid's hands (it was renamed Epiphaneia by Antiochus IV), Rhaga was by then most likely lost to Parthians. Perhaps Parthian-Median hostilities were invoked by Pliny's 6.17 (44) information about two cities named Calliope and Issatis being built east of the Caspian Gates, near Choara, for defense against Medes.

In northwestern Iran, it is highly probable that Mithradates I subjugated Media Atropatene.⁵⁶ It would have been odd if the powerful Parthians had omitted to seize rich Atropatene lying right next to Greater Media. Even before, in the 3rd century, Atropatene had played a key role in western Iran. Antiochus III intervened there and concluded a treaty with the local ruler (220).⁵⁷ No records of the history of Atropatene in the 2nd century are available in Graeco-Roman sources. Still, recently published Babylonian texts contain a valuable hint perhaps concerning the case in point. Now among Mithradates I's officers in Babylonia in 141 appears one Antiochus, the “son of king Ar'abuzana”.⁵⁸ Ar'abuzana apparently renders the name Ariobarzanes. Where did Ariobarzanes reign? Why was his son in Parthian service? The name Ariobarzanes recurred in ruling Atropatene and Cappadocian dynasties in the 1st century B.C. Yet the Parthians did not share a border with Cappadocia in the 2nd century B.C. It is therefore possible

⁵⁴ Del Monte 1997: 55–57; Assar 2006b: 89.

⁵⁵ Chaumont 1973: 201–206.

⁵⁶ Marquart 1901: 109; Koshelenko 1966: 56; contra Aliev 1989: 72, although he does not rule out some form of dependence; also contra Schottky 1989: 203–206.

⁵⁷ Polyb. 5.55.1–10. Cf. Grainger 1997: 82.

⁵⁸ No. –140 Rev. 7; Sachs, Hunger 1996: 135. See Del Monte 1997: 57, 103.

that the reference is to king of Media Atropatene, a vassal of Mithradates I. That Ariobarzanes was likely a son or grandson of Artabazanes, the king who made the treaty with Antiochus III. It is not surprising, therefore, that the name Antiochus should appear in the clan ruling Atropatene (a dynastic marriage might have been concluded between a daughter of Antiochus III and Artabazanes). One more circumstance hints at Atropatene belonging to Parthia under Mithradates I: we know that in ca. 120 Armenia was conquered by Mithradates II (Iust. 42.2.6).⁵⁹ The Parthian attack on Armenia must have moved across Atropatene as there was no other way to march from Iran to Armenia. Apparently, Atropatene, which Iustinus does not mention among Mithradates II's acquisitions, had been conquered or vassalized much earlier, i.e., in 150–140, when Greater Media fell into Parthian hands.

His acquisition of vast territories at the expense of Graeco-Bactria and annexation of Greater Media as well as subjugation of Atropatene strengthened Mithradates I and his empire. However, he still faced some difficult tasks in the west. In a series of campaign, the Parthians occupied Babylonia (141) and invaded Elymais. Yet their rule in southwestern Iran and Babylonia was not quickly established: Parthian domination there was opposed by Elymaians, Persians, and Seleucids. Characene wavered depending on the moment's balance of power.⁶⁰ There followed years of heavy strife on many fronts, but the Arsacids succeeded in holding their own. By and large, the borders of Mithradates I's empire were maintained by Artabanus I (126–123) and Mithradates II (123–87), or even enlarged in places. Mithradates I transformed the Parthian state into a great empire which, with little change in borders, would last until 224 A.D.

⁵⁹ Schottky 1989: 202–231; Schottky 1998: 441 speculates that Atropatene was conquered just then, ca. 120.

⁶⁰ See Schuol 2000; Wiesehöfer 2007.



Figure 1. Merv (Antiocheia in Margiana, Turkmenistan). Ruins of the ancient citadel called Erk-kala.



Figure 2. Merv (Antiocheia in Margiana, Turkmenistan). A section of the defensive walls (constructed under the Seleucids and the Arsacids) excavated in 1997–2003 by V.A. Zavyalov.



Figure 3. Kamyrtapa (Uzbekistan). Ruins of the ancient settlement — general view showing the excavations of 2009 and the Amu Darya plain.



Figure 4. Kamyrtapa (Uzbekistan). View of the excavated settlement.



Figure 5. Bisotun (Iran). Figure of Heracles (149/148 B.C.).

Illustrations (by M.J. Olbrycht):

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